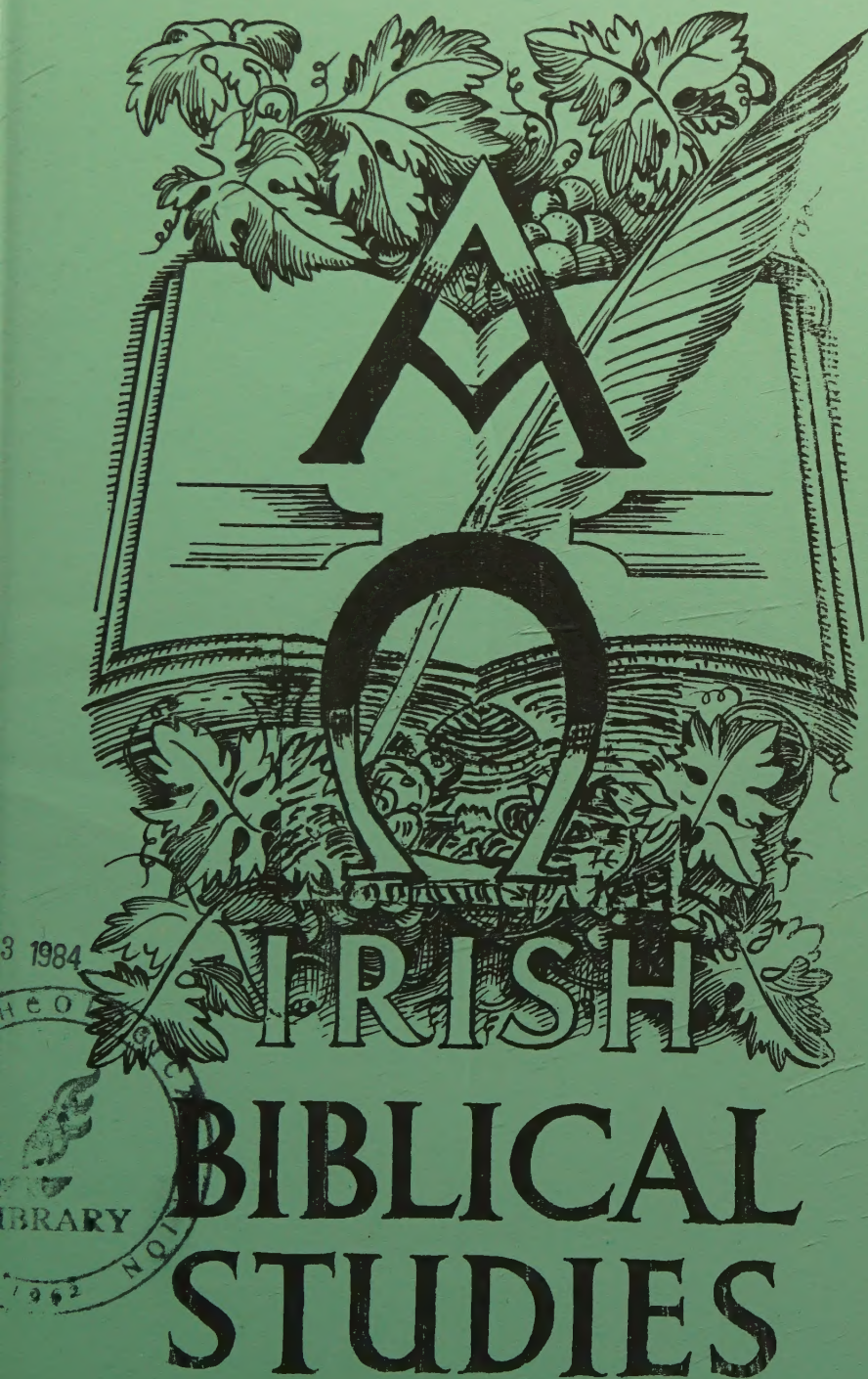


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HER QUINCENTENARY

Significance of Luther Today

J.M. Barkley

I

Martin Luther was born into a world where the old order was disintegrating. The sixteenth century was an age of dramatic change. What had been accepted without question, now was open to debate. Exploration broadened man's perspective. The invention of printing led to a faster dissemination of knowledge. The rise of capitalism brought social and economic changes. Traditional forms of thought and practice were queried in the religious, social and political fields. Men were beginning to think simply in terms of their own locality, but nationally. There was a power-struggle involving the Emperor, France and the Papacy, between the ruling classes and the peasants. /1

Of course, there was also continuity as well as change as is evident from the opposition to some of the social and political changes. The Reformation, which dominated the first half of the century, was a continuation of earlier efforts to reform the Church 'in head and members'. On the latter, let me make two comments. Firstly, the Reformation was part of a movement of thought which affected the whole of Europe. It must not be limited to Protestantism. There were Lutheran, Anabaptist, Radical, Catholic, and Counter-Reformation movements. The Roman Church was reformed. Secondly, as the Dutch Catechism says,

The Reformation is concerned with a serious question. It is something which lays hold of man and changes him at the very roots of his being: his attitude to sin, the world, Christ and God ... The Reformers did not fight for a chimera, /2

Fantasy.

Keeping this in mind, let us look at Luther's early life and education. The Luthers came from Mohra, near Eisenach, in Thuringia. Hans Luther, an ambitious, hard-working and impulsive man was a copper-miner. After his marriage to Margarete Zieler he moved to the walled town of Eisleben. Late at night on 10 November, 1483, his second son was born. The following day he was baptised and in accordance with the pious custom of the period received his name, Martin, in honour of the saint of the day, St. Martin of Tours (c.316-397), the great Christian founder. In 1484, they moved to Mansfeld where Martin spent

his childhood. Like most of the people in Thuringia and Saxony, the town-dwellers in Mansfeld were also countrymen, and so lived close to nature and held many superstitious beliefs, demons poisoned the crops, the insane were possessed by devils, vicious earth-spirits attacked miners underground, and witches cast the evil eye. Luther's youth, as Professor A.G.Dickens says,

was passed amid a cosmic warfare between the power of darkness and light. The saints were helpers in need; in particular the kindly cults of the Blessed Virgin and St. Anne, patroness of miners, brought safety and prosperity. /3

Luther's early image of Christ was received from a painting he saw in a Church showing the Saviour sitting on a rainbow judging the world. First and foremost the Father and the Son were seen as Judges of mankind. As a young man Luther shared the common view of a harsh and arbitrary God, a fear of Christ, and a corresponding reliance upon the saints. He, like many of his contemporaries, was in terror of God, and he tells how he prayed, 'Dear Mary, pray to your Son for me and still his anger.' /4

Three influences in his education require mention.

i At the age of fourteen he went to the school at Magdeburg conducted by the Brethren of the Common Life. It combined a sound classical learning with a study of mystical literature, as in Eckhart, Tauler, Gerard Groote, and Thomas à Kempis. Here Luther breathed the spirit of the devotio moderna long before he began to see its meaning.

ii At the University of Erfurt, which he entered in 1501, Luther was introduced to the via moderna, the Nominalist school of philosophy, based on William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel. By holding that theology and philosophy are separate, that the existence of God and the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be proved by the arguments of men but only by a self-revelation of God, Nominalism undermined much of the teaching of the Scholastics. This school of philosophy influenced Luther, partly unconsciously at first but later made him 'impatient with the late medieval reliance on "reason" for the exposition of religious truth'./6

iii While at Erfurt, Luther became familiar with a group of humanists, who met at Gotha. There is no evidence that he was deeply influenced by them, except that he learned the methods of textual criticism and the importance of using the best texts. /7

He graduated Baccalareus in Artibus in 1502, Magister in 1505, Baccalarius in 1509, and Doctor in Sancta Theologia in 1512. No completely satisfactory explanation has ever been offered for his entering the Augustinian Friary at Erfurt in 1505. It is generally associated with his being almost struck by a thunderbolt when returning from Erfurt from Mansfeld, when in terror he cried out, 'Dear St. Anne, spare me and I will become a monk.' He felt bound by this vow and in spite of his father's opposition and to the consternation of his friends he did so. /8

That Luther underwent acute spiritual conflict as a monk is a common statement, but it needs qualification.

The monastic house at Erfurt, strict in its observance of the Rule, afforded him exactly the type of environment for which he was suited by disposition and conviction. His life there was uneventful and in itself entirely satisfying. His ordination to the priesthood, which took place on 2 May, 1507, he regarded with profound seriousness ... None of the doctrine or practices of his religion did he at this time question ... he had no doubt that the Catholic system was entirely adequate to meet the needs of the spiritual life. /9

This remained the position until by degrees he became aware that it was not adequate. Then he underwent an acute spiritual crisis. When the first questioning arose in his mind it is difficult to say, but possibly c.1507-8. Luther took his monastic vows seriously.

I was a good monk and kept my order so strictly that I could claim that if ever a monk were able to reach heaven by monkish discipline I should have found my way there. All my fellows in the house, who knew me, would bear me out in this. For if it had continued much longer I would, what with vigils, prayers, readings and other such works, have done myself to death. /10

Luther described his case as anfechtung, /11 generally translated 'temptation', though 'anguish' would be better. This had nothing to do with 'petty scruples', but with the really difficult problems of spiritual temptations, temptations about faith and hope, temptations about unworthiness, temptations concerning a man's standing in the presence of God.'

In 1508, he went as lecturer in Aristotelian philosophy in the University of Wittenberg, in which the Augustinians were responsible for the chairs of Philosophy and Biblical Theology. The latter was held by the Vicar-general of the Order, Johann van Staupitz. Recalled to Erfurt for a period he returned to the Black Cloister in Wittenberg in 1511, where from Staupitz he received the greatest help with regard to his anfechtung.

Then we heard you say ... that there is no true poenitentia unless it begins with a love of righteousness (Justitia) and love of God. And this is to be considered the beginning of 'Penitence' which is by those others considered the end and consummation. This your word struck in me like some sharp and mighty arrow and I began from that time onward to look up what the Scriptures teach about penitence ... so that, where before there was hardly a word in the whole Scripture more bitter to me than poenitentia (which I sought to feign in the presence of God (coram Deo) and tried to express with a fictitious and forced love), now nothing sounds sweeter or more graciously to me, than poenitentia ... /12

Continuing Luther adds that when he learned Greek and Hebrew he found this interpretation confirmed. Staupitz taught Luther to see God in the perspective of Christ and advised him to resume his Biblical studies. Writing years later, Luther says,

If I didn't praise Staupitz I should be a damned, ungrateful, papistical ass, for he was my very first father in this teaching, and he bore me in Christ. /13

At first he lectured on The Sentences of Peter Lombard, but having obtained his doctorate he succeeded Staupitz in the chair of Biblical Theology in 1512. Four complete courses of his lectures at this period are extant, on Psalms (1513), Romans (1515-16), Galatians (1516-17), and Hebrews (1517-18), as well as part of his second series on Psalms (1519-21).

We find Hirsch, Vogelsang, and others searching these lectures in an attempt to find the moment of Luther's perception of Justification by faith. This appears to me unrewarding for Luther was already familiar with this concept from St. Augustine's de Spiritu et Littera and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, who held 'a man is not saved by doing good, but by faith, like the thief on the cross'. /14

Those who seek to place his tower-experience 1511-15 refer it to his new understanding that the term 'the righteousness of God' can be understood in a passive sense as the external righteousness by which God justifies men. But can this be described as a break-through? It was familiar to Augustine and the Scholastics. Thus Luther's experience would mean no more than a re-affirmation of traditional Augustinianism. 'There is no evidence', as Reardon points out, 'in the lecture courses of these years to show that his thought had moved in any significant way beyond the Augustinian orbit.' /15

Luther had not yet broken through to his Reformation theology. Then he finds in the Pauline epistles that, because of what God has done in Christ, man's justification no longer depends on his moral achievements - for God actually justifies the ungodly - but on his faith and trust in Christ. Because sin is forgiven and the sinner acquitted the latter's status coram Deo is also changed. Now 'he saw himself as already saved and not merely plodding along the road to salvation.' /16 This is what is radically new - the theology of the grace of God manifested in the cross. It was not the concept of passive righteousness, but, as Bizer /17 says, of the graciousness of God and the Word as the means of grace. The objectivity of God's grace is central. Crux animi Christi ubique in scripturis occurrit. /18 The doctrine of justification fide sola derives directly from this. Faith was the channel through which the grace of the Saviour 'could flow down upon the troubled soul and bring peace and new endeavour'. /19 His writings and life show that this perception came little by little. To date the tower-experience c.1518, as do Saarnivaara and Bizer, points to Luther's reformation break-through not only occurring at the time of the indulgence controversy but being inspired, directly and indirectly, by his need to grapple with the issues it raised.

As our subject is the significance of Luther today let us pause and ask a few questions.

- . What is the concept of God in Christ we present to people today? Is it that of an arbitrary and harsh God or one of a God who loves and cares and redeems? Do converts love God or are they simply refugees from Hell?'
- . Luther changed from a person accepting the status quo without question into one who wanted to know the truth even if it hurt. How true is this of us?

3. Luther 'was saved in his study by hard, costly work on the text of the Bible'. /20 Would some of us today recognise this as a true conversion, if he brought his children to us to be baptised?
4. Luther found the theology offered by the Church true neither to the Bible, nor experience and reason. How many of us would be prepared to examine the Westminster Confession of Faith in the light of Scripture, experience, and reason?
5. How many of our students today read books to learn, or simply to pass examinations?

II

Let us return to Luther's life.

Albert, Prince-archbishop of Mainz, brother of the Elector of Brandenburg, undertook to arrange for the proclamation in his territory of the Indulgence, which Pope Leo X had recently re-issued for the purpose of building St. Peter's at Rome, and employed the Dominican, Johann Tetzel, to preach it. He was a stirring preacher and an excellent salesman, and there is no doubt that it was declared, 'The moment the money rattles in the box a soul flies out of purgatory'. /21

Concerning Indulgences two things may be said.

- i The doctrine of Indulgences had not been defined so it had no dogmatic status in the Church, and, therefore, it was open to debate. /22
- ii There were some princes of undoubted orthodoxy who were opposed to the sale of Indulgences, not for doctrinal reasons, but on the practical ground that it drained their territories financially. The Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise, was one of these. He was proud of the relics he had collected at the Castle Church, containing 17,433 fragments of holy bones, to which was granted to penitent sightseers indulgences amounting to over one hundred thousand years. However, this did not stop people going across the border a few miles away to Zerbst and Juterbogk to hear Tetzel and buy his wares. /23

In October, 1517, Luther was not only professor of Biblical Theology in the University of Wittenberg, but also provincial of eleven priories and priest in the parish church. The last made him responsible

the spiritual welfare of his flock. In hearing the confessions of his parishioners he was shocked to find men and women coming to him with 'confessionalia' purchased from Tetzel, and claiming that these solved them from the duty of doing any penance for their sins. /24

So Luther drew up his Ninety-five Theses, sending copies to Albert, arch-bishop of Mainz, the German primate, and the bishop of Brandenburg, his diocesan. The door of the Castle Church served as the University notice-board. When Luther nailed his Theses to the door on the eve of All Saints, 1517, all he was doing was proposing a university debate. This was nothing new. It had often been done before. He was, as yet, no reformer, and was unaware of what would result from his action. He was still a loyal subject of the Pope, but felt he must protest against an abuse. He was confident that the Pope would do away with the abuses when they were pointed out.

The Ninety-five Theses are a very human document. They are no revolutionary manifesto. In some there is a clear statement of evangelical truth. On the other hand, the authority of the Pope is affirmed, purgatory is taken for granted, and the terms 'faith' and 'justification' are not even mentioned. They are also just as significant for what they say about the Papacy as for their criticism of Indulgences. /25

The invention of printing was fateful. The Theses, to Luther's consternation, were translated into German, printed, and soon circulating widely. He wrote an apologia, /26 which he sent to his diocesan, but Albert had forwarded the documents to Rome demanding that they be inhibited. The Curia saw the affair as a monkish quarrel between the Augustinians and Dominicans to be settled by monastic discipline. /27 Later, when the seriousness of the situation began to be apparent, determined efforts were made to silence Luther, and Leo X in 1518 defined Indulgences in the full Cum post quam /28 in a sense contrary to Luther. He was called upon to recant by Thomas de Vio at Ingolstadt in 1518, and agreed with Karl von Miltitz to cease public discussion of the questions at issue if his opponents did the same. /29 The latter was broken by Johann Eck of Ingolstadt, resulting in the Leipzig Disputation, 1519. /30 This debate turned not so much on the truth or error of any particular doctrine as on the ecclesiastical question of the Divine Right of the Papacy, a subject on which Luther had not yet reached clear convictions. Eck was an able controversialist, and he knew his own mind on the points in dispute, forcing Luther to admit that, according to his views, both the Pope and a General Council

might err, as in the case of John Hus. When Luther first found himself involved in controversy, he was certain that the Church would repudiate Tetzel's views, so he appealed to the Pope. When he found the Pope was against him, he refused to be disillusioned, and he appealed from the Pope ill-informed to the Pope better-informed; and when he found the Pope fully-informed was against him he appealed to a General or German National Council on 28 November, 1518. /31 He had made his breakthrough. He was convinced that justification of the sinner comes only by a living faith in Christ. He was certain that neither Pope nor Council would, or could, declare this gospel-truth a heresy. It was only as a result of the Leipzig Disputation that the real facts of the situation became clear to Luther himself. He now saw clearly where he stood. The Reformer was born.

When Eck returned to Rome he urged drastic action, and the Pope drew up and signed, 15 June, 1520, the bull Exsurge Domine, /32 in which forty-one sentences from Luther's writings were condemned, including 'that the burning of heretics is contrary to the will of the Spirit', and demanding recantation within sixty days. It was hoped that this would bring Luther's activities to an end. He, on the other hand, published his three famous Reformation treatises, which the printing presses poured out by the thousand. /33 On 10 December, 1520, he burned the papal bull, while students sang the Te Deum, and on 3 January the Pope laid him under the ban of the Church in the bull Decet Pontificem Romanum. /34 The Church had failed Luther, and both sides now realised it was a fight to the finish.

The Emperor, Charles V, presided over his first Diet at Worms, 1521. /35 On the Lutheran question the papal party held that as the Pope had already adjudicated on the case nothing remained but to give effect to his decision. Charles would have preferred to outlaw Luther at once, but because of the support he had in Germany he considered it inexpedient to condemn him without giving him an opportunity to state his case. He, therefore, summoned Luther to attend under a safe-conduct. That there was a danger in going Luther knew full well, nevertheless he went.

Brought before the Diet on 17 April, Johann von Eck, an official from the court of the archbishop of Trier, asked if the books on the table were his and demanded that he recant the heresy contained in them. Luther had expected to be faced with definite charges and to be allowed to defend himself. Shaken by events he asked for time to consider and was granted one day more. The following day he made a great oration

mitted the books were his, and ended:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by right reason, for I trust neither in Popes nor in Councils alone, since it is obvious that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, unless I am convinced by Scripture, which I have mentioned, and unless my conscience is made captive by God's Word, I cannot and will not recant, since it is hard, unprofitable, and dangerous to act against one's conscience. God help me. Amen.

Note that the Luther film omits the words 'or by right reason', and that the oft quoted words 'Here I stand, I can do no other', although they do enshrine Luther's loyalty to conviction, are not authenticated.

The emperor called in the electors and some of the princes to ask their opinion. They requested time. 'Very well,' he said, 'I will give my own opinion', and read the following, written in his own hand:

I am descended from a long line of Christian emperors of this German nation, and of the Catholic kings of Spain, the archdukes of Austria, and the dukes of Burgundy. They were all faithful to the death to the Church of Rome, and they defended the Catholic faith and the honour of God. I have resolved to follow in their steps. A single friar who goes counter to all Christianity for a thousand years must be wrong. Therefore I am resolved in this cause to stake my lands, my friends, my body, my blood, my life, and my soul

So Charles delivered judgement upon the Lutheran affair. In a sense, it was his confession of faith, affirmed with an explicitness he never again manifested publicly. Just as Protestants expect Roman Catholics to recognise the sincerity of Luther's confession, so are the latter entitled to expect Protestants to recognise the emperor's sincerity.

Now Caesar had failed Luther, just as the Papacy had already done; and with the delivery of these two antagonistic opinions ended Luther's career as a catholic reformer. This, the Knight's rebellion and the peasants' revolt, finally and completely destroyed the hopes, which Luther had carried with him to Worms, of a united Germany awakening to the glorious work of restoring evangelical truth and piety within her borders.

Three brief points may be made about the Edict of Worms:

i On 6 May, the Emperor presented the final draft of the Edict, which had been prepared by Alexander, the papal nuncio, to a rump Diet, as Frederick of Saxony, Ludwig of the Palatinate, and others had returned home. Though dated the 6th, it was not published until the 26th.

ii During the night following Charles' speech, placards were posted on the Rathaus and throughout Worms with the symbol Bundschuh, the working-man's clog. The people were not represented in the Diet, but they had their say for the poster implied that if Luther was condemned the peasants would rise. As Germany had been plagued by peasant unrest for over a century, the placards caused panic. /36

iii There was no rupture as yet in the German Church as may be seen in the fact that the Pope was able to prevent a meeting of the German Estates to discuss the condition of the Church in their territories, as proposed by the Diet of N rnberg in 1524. /37

Let us again stop to consider the significance of Luther today, and ask a few questions.

1. Are we really pastors? Do we look at the real needs of people, or are we satisfied just to proclaim to them dogmas, many of them drawn from very questionable sources, which Luther, if he was alive today, would reject? In outlook Luther was essentially a pastor, are we?
2. Luther was prepared to debate his theology with the Dominican, Thomas di Vio. Are we prepared to discuss theological questions with Roman Catholics, or are we afraid? Oh! I know that Luther didn't have much success with the intransigent Eck or di Vio. We might not either, but after all the Disputation at Heidelberg won Martin Bucer for the reforming movement.
3. Luther showed tremendous courage in the face of fierce adversity, would we?
4. Are we so fundamentalist that 'right reason' has no place in our belief?

III

Let us return to Luther's life. The Edict of Worms placed the Elector of Saxony in a very awkward position. He could not receive Luther back in Wittenberg as this would mean defiance of the Emperor. He solved the difficulty, without informing himself about it, by having Luther kidnapped on his way home and carried off to his Castle on the Wartburg, near Eisenach. Luther's disappearance led to many rumours, some even of his assassination. For ten months (May, 1521 - March, 1522) Luther remained in the Wartburg as Junker Georg. Owing to inactivity a whole series of Anfechtungen (doubts, insomnia, etc.) arose, but these need not delay us. It was primarily a time of literary activity, an exposition on the 68th. Psalm, Postills on the Magnificat and other liturgical pieces, Contra Latomum, his ablest exposition justifying faith, and so on. However, the most important was his translation of the New Testament into German, published in 1522. It was based on Erasmus' edition of the Greek text. The Bible in German was not completed until 1534. This was not the first German Bible. There had been earlier translations, but none, as Bainton says, 'had the majesty of diction, the sweep of vocabulary, the native earthiness' of Luther's. /39 'I endeavoured', says Luther, 'to make Moses so German that no one would suspect he was a Jew.' /40

Luther's method was to make first a literal translation, which involved a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek grammar and syntax on the necessity for which Luther insisted. This was followed by a free version. Finally, the two were brought together. Luther was never satisfied, and continuously revised his translation. Indeed, the last printed page on which he ever looked was a proof of the latest revision. /41 The Old Testament was a Christian book as only the ceremonial law had been abrogated. The moral law was still valid, so the pre-existent Christ was at work in the prophets, priests, seers, and psalmists. /42 The New Testament was for him a Pauline book, which led him to hold a hierarchy of values within it. First came St. John's Gospel, then the Pauline epistles and First Peter, then the Gospels, and finally the others. /43 He had certain doubts about Revelation because, as he put it, 'a revelation should be revealing.' He did not describe St. James as 'an epistle of straw', but said, 'Compared with the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine epistles the epistle of James is an epistle of straw'. /44

The dividing line between medieval and Reformation exegeses is blurred and fluid. Luther was influenced by Nicholas of Lyra, Jacob

Perez of Valencia, and Jacques Lefèvre. So it is only, broad speaking, in so far as he departed from the fourfold sense of Scripture (literal, tropological, allegorical, anagogical) and restricted the use of allegory to a metaphorical language in the text itself and not figurative meaning imposed on the text from outside, Luther simplified the complex hermeneutical methods of the Middle Ages. /45 'Luther agreed with the late medieval exegetes that the proper ... sense of Scripture is that which the Spirit intends.' /46 A point he put graphically when he said, 'A Bible lying on a dusty library shelf is not the Word of God.'

Luther, says Professor Gritsch,

was a contextual rather than a systematic theologian, a biblical scholar who felt constrained to relate his findings to concrete situations relating to the issues of his age ... mindful of the hermeneutical principle, 'You must keep your eye on the word that applies to you'. /47

Gritsch uses the term 'contextual' theologian, but with Professor John Thompson I prefer the term ad hoc theologian. This, of course, has its limitations, but an examination of this lies outside the scope of this lecture.

While in exile troubles were brewing. Things were not going well in Wittenberg. There was rioting and iconoclasm, and the reformist movement was splitting into factions. So, in spite of the Elector's warning, Luther returned to Wittenberg. He counselled moderation and warned against liberty being allowed to degenerate into license. The majority gave heed to his words and within a week order was restored. His victory led to the departure of the extremists, including Carlstadt.

Again on the significance of Luther today we may ask several questions:

1. How many of us have kept up our Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, as Luther would have insisted?
2. How many students in our Colleges intend to continue Biblical studies in the original when they enter the ministry?
3. Luther saw the vital necessity of vernacular translations, but to him no such translation was perfect. How many of us make a 'go out of a particular translation?

4. Are we aware of the limitation of contextual exegesis and how it may on occasion distort eternal truth?

IV

Let us again turn back to Luther, omitting at this point reference to the Peasants' revolt. The Diet of Speier, 1526, adopted an ambiguous formula:

In matters of religion and of the Edict of Worms, each Prince is to live, rule, and conduct himself, as he shall answer to God and his Imperial Majesty.

Each side interpreted this differently. The papal party held it to mean that a ruling prince who took the side of Luther did so at his peril; whereas the Lutherans held that a ruling prince was at liberty to do as his conscience directed. The next three years, therefore, were devoted by the Lutherans to organising the Church. What did Luther contribute to this?

1) Luther, provided the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments were not interfered with, desired as little change as possible. The prince was put in the place left vacant by the denial of the bishop's authority, but the consistorial courts were continued though the personnel was changed. The Reformation exalted the sermon, but this is not to say it invented preaching.

In the century preceding Luther, for the single province of Westphalia ten thousand sermons are in print, and though they are extant only in Latin they were delivered in German. /48

Luther held that salvation is through the word. The Church is constituted by the Word of divine grace. So, too, are Sacraments, which draw their whole meaning from the Word. Without the Word the elements of water, or bread and wine, are devoid of sacramental quality. Thus to the believer the Sacraments, by God's express ordinance, are channels of His grace. Hence the centrality of the preaching office. In preaching Luther followed the Christian Year using the lections assigned by long usage to each Sunday. Sermons are to be based on the lections, otherwise Luther says, 'instead of the Gospel and its exposition, they will be preaching ... about blue ducks.' /49 In this area Luther did not innovate.

b) He held that the training of pastors, teachers and parents would not suffice. There must be provision of religious literature adapted to children. Such material was so meagre in the Middle Ages that 'one can without exaggeration ascribe to the Reformation the creation of the first body of religious literature for the young.' /50 Luther produced two catechisms in 1529 - The Larger Catechism for adults and The Smaller Catechism for children. /51 Both are based on the Decalogue, the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. The former is more elaborate, theological and polemical; and is not in the form of question and answer. The latter is one of Luther's finest works and is completely free of polemics. Luther intended the catechisms to be used in church as a basis for sermons, but more particularly in the home. The father should examine the children at least once a week and also the servants. If the children would not learn, they should not eat; if the servants refused, they should be dismissed. /52

c) Luther also contributed to the reform of public worship. While at the Wartburg he realised that changes in the liturgy were imperative. He was very conservative in liturgical matters, so he made as little alteration as possible in his Formula Missae, 1523. /53 This work is not a liturgy, but rather a description of how an evangelical liturgy might be ordered; and it belongs to the period when reform of the Mass was by excision. In the Liturgy of the Word there is little change. The Kyrie, Gloria, Gradual, Alleluia, Epistle and Gospel, are retained, with the Sequences discontinued, then comes the Sermon and Nicene Creed.

The Christian Year is adopted. The Liturgy of the Faithful, however, undergoes radical change. The Offertory is omitted, as is the whole Canon except the Words of Institution, after which come the Sanctus and Benedictus. The minister pronounces the Pax. Then comes the Agnus Dei and communion in both kinds. Several post-communion prayers are listed followed by the Benediction from Num.6 or Ps 67. The main theological factor was that all pretension to 'human merit' and 'the sacrifice of the mass' should be excluded. It is clear from this that Luther aims at a revision in harmony with the history and continuity of the Church catholic and the communion of saints.

Luther, however, gradually came to recognise that since the rite was still in Latin the people would not see that the 'idea of sacrifice' had been removed. So he published his Deutsche Messe, 1526. /54 Now the whole rite was in German except for the Greek refrain Kyrie eleison

vestments, incense, and the elevation of the host and the chalice remained, but communion was in both kinds. Congregational singing came on as the number of hymns in German increased. As Todd, the Roman Catholic historian, puts it,

Luther instituted a 'reformed' liturgy, not at all a new liturgy. At the centre of it was the sacramental communion. Apart from the suppression of all references to sacrifice, the important changes were all positive and related to hearing the Word of God, in Scripture and through preaching. /55

However, as Brilioth says, 'It is important rather because it came out with Luther's own authority than for its liturgical merits'. /56

) Luther's most far-reaching changes were with regard to music and the use of hymns. The former is a highly technical subject, the epistle to be sung in the eighth tone, the Gospel in the fifth, etc./57
limitation of time forbids discussion. With regard to hymnody he brought out a Gesangbuch, 1524. It included twenty-three hymns, six were versifications from the Psalter and twelve paraphrases of Latin hymns. His greatest hymn, of course, is his version of the 46th Psalm. /58
The Hebrew reads, 'God is our refuge', but the Vulgate has 'God is a refuge.' Luther in his personal devotions continued to use the Bible in the Latin in which he had grown up, so it begins, 'A mighty fortress is our God'. In Lutheranism the people learned to sing, so much so in fact that a Jesuit paid Luther the tribute, 'The hymns of Luther killed more souls than his sermons'.

) Luther had produced a Baptismal rite in German in 1523 /59
which was little more than a translation of the Roman Ordo. He revised it in 1526. /60

At the door of the Church there is ... sign of the cross, prayer, exorcism, Gospel Church ... Aaronic blessing, three-fold renunciation and profession of faith, baptism with water in the triune name, Pax, and prayer.

In addition he wrote books for pastors on the practice of confession and the solemnisation of marriage.

These were Luther's main contributions to the re-building of the church. Have they any significance today?

1. Do we base our preaching upon the mighty acts of God linking it to the Christian Year?
2. Are our sermons based on the lections or 'blue ducks'?
3. Do we regard worship as a coming face to face with God in Christ or simply a routine form?
4. Do we recognise that each service ... public worship, baptism, Lord's Supper, ordination, evangelistic ... has its rationale?
5. Do we in liturgical reform take the history and continuity of Christ's Church and the Communion of Saints as the basis, or are we satisfied with emotional revivalism or didactic exercise?
6. What about the training of families and children? Do we use the work of outside commercial concerns or seek to educate our children within the family?
7. In hymnody do we prefer the sentimentality of the Victorian era or the emotionalism of revivalism to hymns which set out objectively the great acts of God in Christ?
8. The same question could be asked with regard to music. Have we forgotten that only the best should be used to glorify God, and that the cheap and sentimental is an insult?

V

Let us now return to Luther, and look at a happy event. On the eve of the Resurrection, 1523, Leonard Kopp, who delivered herrings to the convent, bundled twelve nuns into his covered wagon as if the barrels were empty. /61 Three returned to their homes, but Luther had to find husbands or positions for the others. In the end all were provided for except Katherine von Bora, who two years after her escape was still in domestic service. It was suggested that Luther should marry her, but he just laughed and told the joke to his father, who saw it as no joke but took it seriously. /62 The marriage was a great occasion, the invitation to Leonard Kopp saying, 'I am to be married on Thursday. My lord Katie and I invite you to send a barrel of the best Torgau beer.' /63 After the marriage at 10 a.m. on 25 June, 1525, in the parish Church there was a banquet in the Augustinian cloister and a dinner and dance in the Rathaus. The best commentary I know is Rupp's,

It turned out marvellously well for its unromantic beginning. Certainly Luther, whose bed had not been made for years, needed looking after. He found deep joy and refreshment in his family, and as the children came, and some of them died, his home became a more effective apologetic for marriage of the clergy than any writing and the prototype of a pattern of a Christian minister's household which has greatly enriched European history. /64

Here again the question of Luther's significance arises, but I ask only one question.

. While one's home is in a sense a private matter, in another it is representative. Do we, even though some of us may have particular difficulties, seek to make it, as Luther did, a witness to the community?

VI

Let us look at Luther and consider his attitude to civil authority.

a) Let us look first at the Peasants' revolt, 1524-25, which spread rapidly into the Rhineland, Swabia, Franconia, and Thuringia. Some hold Luther responsible, but this is to ignore the fact that there had been numerous risings during the previous century. In the main they were concerned with the redress of specific ills, serfdom, feudal dues, clerical exactions, and tithes. The movement soon got out of hand, and extremist actions, like the Weinsberg massacre, destroyed the credibility of the whole. Eventually the rulers proved victorious and the rebellion was suppressed with the utmost cruelty and savagery. /65

At the beginning Luther advocated moderation, urging the rulers to be generous and merciful. But when his advice was not followed, the atrocities led him to come out strongly on the side of the rulers, and it is scarcely too much to say he hounded them on to extirpate the rebels.

It is your duty to destroy the rebels by every means in your power, by fire, sword, or hanging. Every man who meets a rebellious peasant is called upon to kill him as much as if he were a mad dog or a wild beast. /66

It is impossible to exaggerate the injury this did to the Reformation.

i the catholic princes held Luther responsible for the rising, and so excluded evangelical preachers from their territories. Indeed, as Bainton points out, 'the persistent Catholicism of Bavaria and Austria dates not so much from the Counter-Reformation as from the Peasants' War.' /67

ii It diverted many of the peasants from Lutheranism. They tended to regard Luther as a traitor, and while many moderates remained within Lutheranism the more extreme tended to find their religious home in Anabaptism. /68

iii It made Luther distrust the people, and drove a wedge between him and them, the width of which may be guessed from his own words, 'I feared if the peasants became lords, the devil would become abbot.' /69

How are we to account for Luther's conduct? The probable explanation is to be found in Luther's overwhelming sense of the duty of obedience to civil authority.

b) Let us now look at the founding of the Schmalkalden League. Luther was adamant that rebellion of a people against their ruler was not justifiable. /70 But, what if it be the case of one ruler, say the Elector of Saxony, who was virtually sovereign in his own territory, defending his rights against another ruler, say the Emperor, whose rights with respect to the Elector were constitutionally defined. Luther admitted that this was a question for jurists to decide, not theologians. /71 This removed his veto, and he reluctantly consented to the formation of the Schmalkalden League, 1531. The unity among German-speaking protestants that Philip had worked for, for years, was now realised, and the League was soon to prove so strong that it was able for a decade to secure its members immunity from attack even by the Emperor.

c) Let us now look at the shift in the character of the Reformation itself, and its effect. It had begun its transition from an ideological movement made up of committed individuals to an established institution embracing whole political entities. Up to 1530 most of Luther's treatises were addressed to the un-converted, to open-minded catholics, and dedicated to the exposition of the evangelical faith. In his later years many were works of exhortation, aimed at the converted, at convinced protestants, and were often politically inspired. They are polemical and abusive, and serve primarily political and propagandist ends.

Some explain Luther's increased abusiveness to illness and old age. To do so is quite inadequate as it does not explain the historical significance of the polemics. In 1541, in support of the Elector's policy towards Duke Henry of Braunschweig-Wolfenbuttel, Luther wrote Against Hans Wurst, /73 which though it contains a reasoned discussion of the true and false church heaps insult upon insult upon Henry. It is coarse and vulgar, and has to be read to appreciate 'the elegance of the insults'. Then in 1545, Luther wrote an Open Letter to the Elector of Saxony and the Landgrave of Hesse concerning the captured Henry of Braunschweig-Wolfenbuttel. /74 It seeks to persuade the Landgrave from releasing Henry, whom he had defeated and held prisoner. This called for a moderate and reasoned attack upon Henry. This Luther provides, so it would appear that vulgarity and abuse were by choice. Luther could turn it on and off to suit his purpose.

Luther's Against the Papacy at Rome, Founded by the Devil, 1545,/75 was written at the urging of the Elector in reply to the Pope's letter to the Emperor. Its aim was to awaken Protestants to the true horror of the papal antichrist and to discredit the Council of Trent. It is the most violent and vulgar treatise to issue from Luther's pen, yet it too contains more than ranting and abuse, and shows that Luther even at the end of his life could produce a coherent attack on the papacy, but one must not lose sight of its political aim and purpose.

Luther's language shocked even his supporters, but it was skilfully encouraged and used by the Elector and Philip for political ends. Luther had become a party-man.

In considering the significance of Luther today it is necessary to ask a few more questions.

One hears references to Luther from speakers in the Assembly. Do we ever ask, Have they read him? Are they quoting out of context? Have they just searched out something lurid to serve their own ends?

Has a minister of the Gospel ever a right to become a party-man?

Have abuse and vulgarity any place in discussion or the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ?

Luther's partisanship lost Bavaria and Austria. Do we ever think about that?

VII

Let us again turn to Luther's life and look at the question of inter-Church discussions.

i **Lutheran/Reformed.** In 1529, the Emperor's hands were free to crush the Reformation by force, if necessary...even so at the Diet of Speier the Lutherans joined the papal party in refusing toleration to the Reformed. /76 There were strong Reformed Churches in German-speaking Switzerland and the imperial cities of southern Germany. In 1529 the political situation was so grave that Philip of Hesse sought to weld all Protestants into a defensive, self-protecting, League. His main difficulty was Luther's and Melanchthon's distrust of the Swiss Reformers. So he arranged a colloquy at his castle at Marburg, 1 - 4 October, 1529. /77 It drew up fifteen articles. On fourteen there was complete agreement, and also on the first part of the fifteenth on 'the real presence of Christ in the Supper.' They differed, however, in the second part on the manner of Christ's presence. Many consider the colloquy a failure. True the Landgrave had failed. There was no united Protestant front, but it is impossible to deny the large measure of doctrinal agreement that existed between the two parties. One point, however, appears to have been overlooked by historians, namely, that Luther was prepared to agree to inter-communion had it not been for Melanchthon. Indeed, the latter played a sorry part in the colloquy for he used the whole weight of his influence with Luther to prevent an agreement, a stance he continued to take at the Diet of Augsburg, 1530. /78

ii **Protestant/Roman.** When Luther made a formal appeal to a Council in 1518, he was still a loyal son of the Church. /79 At the Diet of Worms, 1521, the papal legate declared, 'The whole world shouts "Council, Council."' /80 The Diets of Nürnberg, 1523, Speier, 1524, 1526, and Augsburg, 1530, Regensburg, 1532 all called for a Council, and during 1532-33 Charles negotiated with Pope Clement about calling a Council, but achieved nothing, the latter postponing a Council indefinitely in November, 1533. /80 Pope Paul III summoned a Council to Mantua for 1537, but it fell through because of the opposition of the French. He called one for Vicenza in 1538, but after being twice postponed it too fell through. In each case the responsibility lies with the political ambitions of the French and the Emperor, not the Lutherans. In fact, Luther in 1535 had promised the papal nuncio, Pietro Vergerio, that he would attend the council wherever it might be convened. /81 The danger to the Protestant appeal to a General

council was that it would not be a 'free Christian Council', but a council on the model of Constance. The rulers and theologians were of different minds how to deal with this. The Rulers, including John Frederick of Saxony, viewed it in political and legal terms. He expected that a catholic majority would dominate the Council and force its will on the protestant minority. The theologians, including Luther, while expecting little from a papal council, urged the Elector not to refuse the invitation. For them it was a matter of faith. Not only would it look bad to refuse after having called for one for so many years, it would suggest a lack of faith and trust in God's ability to protect them. The theologians lost the argument with the rulers and so acquired the doubtful privilege of justifying the decision and discrediting the papal council. Luther's attack on the papal council, therefore, was meant to serve this political decision. /82 What happened was that the concept of a Council had now taken on a different connotation for each side. For the papalists it was the Pope's responsibility to convene and order a General Council and promulgate those of its decrees of which he approved. For the Lutherans, as for Catholics, the Council was the visible representative of the universal Church, but its decrees had to conform with Scripture.

Limitation of time prevents reference to the publications concerning a Council, 1532-38, but when Pope Paul III postponed the Council of Licenza in May 1539, Luther published On the Councils and the Church. /83 In the first part he aims to show that the Church cannot depend upon the fathers or the councils to establish its faith, only on Scripture, and that a council has no authority to introduce anything new concerning faith and morals but only to defend the ancient faith in accordance with Scripture. In the second part he attempts to show that the apostles' Council, Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon do not attempt to formulate new articles of faith. Rather they confirmed and defended what was formulated in Scripture. Then he asks, What is a council and what is its task? A Council is nothing but a consistory, a supreme court (Consistorium, Camergericht) or the like which passes judgement after hearing the parties. It should only deal with faith and morals in accordance with Scripture, and then only when faith is in danger. For Luther a council performed the same function as pastors and teachers although on a wider scale. In the third part, he turns from councils to a discussion of the the 'holy Christian church' as the 'holy Christian people' (gemeinde), known by the presence of the Word of God, baptism and the Supper, the proper use of the keys, the proper calling of ministers, the life of prayer, and the bearing of the cross.

iii The Pope's postponement of the council and relations with France also led the Emperor to adopt a policy of unionpolitik. So he promoted a series of religious colloquys at Hagenau, Worms, and Regensburg, 1540-41, in an effort to restore Christian unity in Germany. /84 In these leading protestant and papal representatives participated. The hope of unity had never been higher than at Regensburg, and there was a genuine spirit of moderation. A measure of unanimity was reached on original sin and the bondage of the will. Agreement was even reached on the doctrine of justification. Justitia imputata and justitia inhaerens were distinguished and forthwith brought together as follows:

We are justified (justitia imputata) by faith, but the very exercise of this justifying faith causes justitia inhaerens.

Deadlock, however, was reached over the doctrine of transubstantiation and the adoration of the host.

'The conferences', says Basil Hall, 'failed principally because of the intransigents who were not even present.' /85 Melancthon was repudiated by the Elector and Luther, and Contarini by the papacy. In addition there was the political manoeuvring of the Elector of Brandenburg and Philip of Hesse on the one hand, and on the other of the Bavarian dukes who saw 'war, bloody war' as the only solution.

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that good men of undoubted catholic piety, learning, and integrity, like Contarini, Groper, and von Pflug, and good men of evangelical faith and devotion, like Melancthon, Bucer, Capito, and Calvin were prepared to meet in a quest for reconciliation. What they sought should not be forgotten or ignored, for example, one can read Bainton's Here I Stand or Pitter's Luther's Life and Work without knowing that these colloquys even took place.

Their failure meant that the concept of a catholic reformation disappeared and was replaced by that of a Counter-Reformation. The way was now open for the Council of Trent and the Schmalkald war.

From these events we may ask questions about the significance of Luther today.

1. In this 'distressful country' are we prepared, like the Reformers, to seek reconciliation with our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen?

We may fail, but are we prepared to try?

Luther allowed himself to be used to defend a political decision with which he did not agree, should we?

Do we regard church courts as consistories or as dictators in matters of faith and morals?

Luther would have gone to Mantua because he believed in God's protection, have we this trust?

VIII

Let us again return to Luther. As we have seen, c.1528-30 there was a shift in the character of the Reformation itself. It had become an established institution embracing whole political entities. Luther had experienced some of the inevitable disappointments and consequences that accompany such a change - the brutal realities of the Peasants' revolt, the deplorable state of the Church revealed by the Visitations, the rending of Protestantism into factions, the intransigence of the Papacy, the formation of protestant and papal Leagues, and the nightmare war between the protestants and the Emperor. Such disappointments and fears strengthened Luther's apocalyptic conviction that he was living on the eve of the Last Judgment. His friends saw Luther as a re-carnated Elijah, but he liked to see himself as Noah. /86 He thought, like Noah, stood alone against an ungrateful world. He even figured it that the chronological distance between Adam's death and Noah's birth was the same as between himself and John Hus - 126 years. /87 The world began to look to him like the world before the flood. Only Christ could solve the problem of division between belief and unbelief. 'believe', he says, 'that we are the last trumpet which prepares for the advent of Christ.' /88

Now his polemics are addressed to his supporters. Now the Reformation needed to be defended in face of attacks from the Papacy, Turks, Jews, and fanatics. It was time to rally the troops. 'This stage in the movement's history', as Dr M.U. Edwards says, 'was well served by Luther's apocalyptic vision of the climactic struggle between the true and false church, between the followers of Christ and the minions of Satan.' /89

In 1523, Luther wrote That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew, /90 which had hoped might 'entice some Jews to the Christian faith', but

without success. In 1543, twenty years later, he wrote On the Jews and Their Lies. /91 He says their synagogues and schools should be burned and their homes destroyed. All their liturgical books and Talmudic writings should be seized, their rabbis forbidden to preach, their safe-conducts withdrawn, their usury forbidden, their money taken from them. They should be put to work in the fields, or better expelled. Luther identified a Jew by his religious beliefs, not by race. His belief was that Jewish preaching, which it was reported they had been exercising publicly, contained blasphemy. The apocalyptic view of Luther was that they were God's 'rejected people' and the Last Judgment was at hand. No wonder Bainton writes, 'One could wish that Luther had died before ever this tract was written'. /92

Luther's attacks on the anabaptists and fanatics is only relatively less severe. In 1527, he had said:

Let everyone believe what he likes. If he is wrong, he will have punishment enough in hell fire. Unless there is sedition, one should oppose them with Scripture and God's word.

Following the taking over of Munster by force in 1534 and the inauguration of the 'reign of the saints', in a memorandum, drawn up by Melanchthon and signed by Luther, the distinction between peaceful and revolutionary anabaptists was obliterated, and the formation of sects held to be an offence against God. This was sedition and blasphemy and merited death. /93

In general Luther viewed the history of his own time as the realization of the apocalyptic predictions in Daniel and Revelation. This plays a major role in the polemics of the older Luther. The papacy is seen as the antichrist and the Turks as the devil incarnate. The latter were the 'little horn' of Daniel and the Gog of Ezekiel and Revelation. /94 Their success was a prelude to the Last Judgment.

At the heart of Luther's Against the Papacy at Rome, Founded by the Devil lies the conviction that he is attacking the antichrist itself. The Pope was not and could not be the head of the Christian Church, rather says Luther, he

is the head of the accursed church of the worst rascals on earth; vicar of the devil; an enemy of God; an opponent of Christ; and a destroyer of the church of Christ; a teacher of all lies, blasphemy, and idolatries; an arch-church-thief and

church-robber of the keys and all the goods of both the church and the secular lords; a murderer of kings and inciter of all sorts of bloodshed; a brothel-keeper above all brothel-keepers and all lewdness, including that which is not to be named; an antichrist; a man of sin and child of perdition; a true werewolf...

/95

That is one of the milder passages, but it is adequate to show Luther's view. However, one point is fairly clear, namely, that amidst the inflammatory rhetoric Luther identifies the devil behind each of his opponents - whether the papacy, Turks, Jews, or fanatics - and addresses this Satanic opponent rather than the human beings who were put its mask. Satan had unleashed all his minions for one climactic battle.

Looking at the significance of Luther today we may ask:

- Luther appears to be a man with an obsession, are we - obsessed - against Rome, against fanatics, against bishops, against the WCC - are we?
- Luther's obsession led him into expressions which the Nazis' were able to twist for their evil propaganda purposes. Do we ever by our expressions give assistance to supporters of apartheid, terrorism, bigotry or some other evil? Are our hands clean?
- Did Luther's political alignment lead to misinterpretation of Scripture? Is this true of us?

IX

Let us turn back to Luther and conclude. Two months after the opening of the Council of Trent (December, 1545), and eight before the outbreak of the disastrous Schmalkald war (September, 1546), Luther died at Eisleben, 18 February, 1546. Crowds lined the roads as his body was brought back to Wittenberg, and followed Katherine Luther and her children into the Castle Church. The cortège entered by the same door in which thirty years before Luther had posted his famous Ninety-five theses. Bugenhagen preached and Melancthon delivered a valedictory oration. The rites concluded, Luther's coffin was lowered into a grave in front of the pulpit where he had so often preached, proclaiming salvation by God's grace through faith in Christ alone.

On this the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther what are we to say is his significance? Surely, it is that he was a man with many human failings, who met God in Christ face to face, and God, through the Holy Spirit, used him mightily.

Notes

1. H.G.Koenigsberger and G.L. Mosse, Europe in the Sixteenth Century pp 1-6.
2. The New Catechism p.226.
3. A.G.Dickens, Martin Luther and the German Reformation pp 2-3.
4. Ibid p.3.
5. R.M.G.Reardon, Religious Thought in the Reformation pp 13,49.
6. J.M.Todd, Martin Luther p.51.
7. Reardon p.49.
8. Dickens pp 9-10.
9. Ibid p.50.
10. WA xxxviii 143.
11. WA i 557.
12. WA i 525.
13. O.Scheel, edit. Dokumente zu Luthers Entwicklung S1,512.
14. Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul
15. Reardon p.54.
16. Ibid p.56.
17. E.Bizer, Fides et auditu pp 166-7
18. WA iv 87 35.
19. O.Chadwick, The Reformation p.46
20. J.Atkinson, Martin Luther and the Birth of Protestantism p.78
21. B.J.Kidd, edit. Documents of the Continental Reformation pp 12-20
22. Todd pp 277-81.
23. Cambridge Modern History ii p.76
24. Todd pp 277-81.
25. Kidd pp 21-6.
26. Cam. Mod. Hist. ii p.77.
27. Ibid p.77.
28. Denz. 1447-9.
29. Kidd pp 33-7, 41-2.

1. Ibid pp 44-51.
2. Ibid p.40.
3. Denz. 1451-92.
4. Cam. Mod. Hist. II p.77.
5. E.G.Rupp and B.Drewery
Martin Luther, pp 62-7.
6. Kidd pp 80-9.
7. R.H.Bainton Here I Stand
pp 187-8.
8. Deutsche Reichstagsten
iv 109.
9. Briefwechsel (WA) 435.
10. Bainton p. 427.
11. Tishreden (WA) 2771.
12. Bainton p.327.
13. Ibid p.334.
14. Ibid p.332.
15. Erlangen Ausgabe 73, 115.
16. Interpretation, July, 1983
pp 230-2.
17. Ibid p.233.
18. Ibid p.266.
19. Bainton p.348.
20. Kidd p.200
50. Bainton p.336
51. WA xxx 1 126-249.
52. Bainton p.337.
53. Kidd pp 127-32.
54. Ibid pp 193-202.
55. Todd p.230.
56. Y.Brilioth Eucharistic
Faith and Practice p.120.
57. Kidd p.199.
58. Ibid pp 132-3.
59. WA xii 51-2
60. WA xix 537-41.
61. BR 600.
62. Ibid 890, 900.
63. Ibid 898.
64. Cam. Mod. Hist. ii p.90.
65. Bainton pp.268-84.
66. WA xviii 358.
67. Bainton p.284.
68. Ibid p.281.
69. WA xviii 400-01.
70. Dickens pp 106-8.

71. BR vi 16-57.
72. M.U.Edwards, Luther's Last Battles p.133.
73. WA li 469-572.
74. WA liv 379-411;
BR xi 223-5, 232-4.
75. WA liv 206-99;
BR xi 58, 71.
76. Kidd pp 182-5.
77. Ibid pp 247-55.
78. Ibid pp 256-300.
79. WA ii 39-40.
80. Edwards pp 72-5.
81. Ibid p.77.
82. WA viii 35-8; 1 166.
83. WA 1 509-653.
84. Kidd pp 341-6.
85. D.Baker, edit. Councils and-Assemblies pp 237,266.
86. Interpretation p.276.
87. WA xxxv 412-80.
88. WA Xlii 265.
89. Edwards p.205.
90. WA xi 314 -36; TR 2912.
91. WA lii 417-49.
92. Bainton p.279.
93. WA xxvi 145-6; xxxi 1 208;
1 6-14.
94. Edwards p.16.
95. WA liv 290-2.

THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL TILlich

D. Drysdale

There are few theologians, of this century, who like Paul Tillich manage to speak the language of our time while speaking of that which is timeless.

Tillich is equally at home in the cultural and philosophical genre of his day and in the biblical roots of his theology. Therefore in order to understand something of the role of Scripture in his thought and message, we must hold together these two tenses; the past and the present. And it is not simply a matter of bringing the past up to date; the Bible, as it were, translated into modern psychological concepts. Though that is certainly part of Tillich's approach to biblical interpretation. Neither is it simply a case of transferring the present back into the Prophetic-Apostolic ages in order to let the scriptures work over the events of today and clarify their meaning. The tension between past and present in Tillich's theology is much more complex than that, as we shall see when we investigate his thinking more thoroughly.

There are, of course, those critics who dismiss Tillich as being a 'biblical' theologian in any sense of the term 'biblical'. They argue that he has found prominence simply because many people unhappy with what appears to them as the old fashioned voice of biblical prophets like Barth and Niebuhr, have reacted by preferring prophets who have no biblical voice at all! /1 Among whom they would, no doubt, also number contemporary theologians like Jurgen Moltmann and those of the so called 'liberation' school.

That Tillich has a burning desire to speak to modern man in the midst of his secularism and technology, and present a theological assessment that is both relevant and necessary to his situation is beyond dispute. And this emphasis may appear to overshadow the biblical theme.

It is equally true that he devotes no large section of his three volumes of systematic theology to what we might call 'the doctrine of the word of God'. And the role of Scripture in his theology is not therefore clearly defined, which makes the task of describing that role all the more difficult. It cannot be lifted out en bloc, but rather has to be disentangled from his theology.

However it is a very superficial criticism indeed, though often made, that fails to recognise the scriptural material that threads its way through Tillich's published works. And it is in fact this biblical texture of his theology, I feel, that makes it so preachable; as his three volumes of sermons illustrate so brilliantly.

Two Concepts of Religion

It is vital at the outset to get clear in our minds the double-edged nature of Tillich's understanding of religion. This understanding is crucial for his theology, fundamental in his thinking, and a controlling and determining element in his approach to Scripture.

Tillich works with what he describes as 'the fundamental concept' and 'the traditional concept' of religion. /2

By 'the fundamental concept' he means the state of being grasped by Ultimate Concern; that is, living in such a way that we are aware of the fact that there is something that we take with unconditional seriousness. This is akin to Soren Kierkegaard's famous phrase about living with an 'infinite passion'! It is not that we possess this Ultimate Concern, but rather that it is an awareness of being possessed by it. /3

We may use the term God in this connection if we wish, providing we understand that what we mean by God is this Ultimate Concern, and not merely certain images associated with the term God.

If Tillich is pushed to a definition of God then he reluctantly defines God as 'being itself' and as such the 'ground of our being'. God therefore holds us in 'being' and so possesses us rather than us ever possessing Him; indeed every attempt to define God which is an effort to possess Him inevitably lapses into idolatry. Hence Tillich's reluctance to provide any definition at all, and his insistence that at best such definitions must be understood as being symbolical. For this reason too Tillich is unhappy to speak of God as 'existing'!

He prefers to speak of God then in this experimental way; our Ultimate Concern which grasps our lives filling them with an unconditional seriousness and passion.

Religion in its truest, highest, and fundamental meaning is this spiritual dimension of being 'grasped'.

There is however also a secondary sense in which we can understand religion; the concept that is 'traditional'. By this Tillich refers to the various ways we seek to express and make visible our response to our Ultimate Concern. In other words the emergence of the traditional symbols and rituals which provide the vehicles for conveying Ultimate Concern and sustaining our 'infinite passion'.

This is, if you like, the moveable furniture of the religious scenery and Tillich's theology allows for considerable freedom in the whole area of 'traditional' religion. It is a freedom capable of re-interpreting basic Christian symbols when they cease to function as they should. Though more of this later when we look at the importance of symbolism in general in relation to the scriptures.

Now this twofold understanding of religion enables Tillich, to use a phrase of the late John F. Kennedy's, to 'hold firm the centre while prodding around the edges'. And specifically in his treatment of Scripture it means that he seeks to retain its central message about the relationship between man and his Ultimate Concern, and the focus of this relationship in what Tillich calls 'the unique event of Jesus the Christ'. While at the same time he exercises a spirit of venture in his interpretation of biblical 'myths' and 'symbols'.

The Basic Sources of Theology

The Bible is authoritative for Tillich and is, he argues, the basic source for systematic theology because it is the 'original document' about the events on which Christianity is founded.

No one can read his sermons and fail to appreciate the profound biblical exposition which forms the core of his preaching. But that said, Tillich certainly sits loose to the historical questions that concern so many biblical scholars. He regards the biblical material as important not so much for the historical facts it may contain, but primarily because it presents what he calls 'theologically interpreted facts'. /4

As a document recording pure historical facts the Bible would undoubtedly be of interest to historians, but would have little relevance for faith and its significance today. It is therefore essentially in its presentation of 'theologically interpreted facts' that it becomes 'word of God' for us.

As a result Tillich together with Bultmann, to whom he acknowledges a great debt, would not consider it necessary to be certain of a sound historical basis for these 'theologically interpreted facts'. Which in turn leads on to his view that the exegesis of Scripture cannot do the whole work of theology. For this we need the authenticating tools of 'the philosophy of life'.

Therefore Tillich calls into service the interpretative elements in Culture and Tradition to assist the biblical message becoming a message of Ultimate Concern for us today.

By Culture, Tillich would include art, literature, philosophy and science and everything which has 'aesthetic value' and the power to enable the biblical word to become incarnate in human experience.

One of the main planks in Tillich's argument in relation to the role of Culture in theological interpretation is that aesthetic values transcend any one discipline and so provide a correlation between disciplines.

Tillich, as a result, is not afraid to embrace philosophy, especially Existentialism in its twentieth century form, and to employ (to great effect) the insights of modern psychology in his presentation of biblical material.

Much of this goes back to his early days of enchantment with Kierkegaard, the influence of Schelling, and a romanticism which gave him a very sensitive and, as he says himself, an almost 'pagan' feeling for life; an openness to nature and the world around him. He had a particular love of trees and a kind of mysticism creeps into his language when he talks about them.

Culture then in its many aspects is an integral part of Tillich's hermeneutic when he tries to interpret the biblical message for his generation.

Alongside Culture we must also set Tradition. And the importance of Tradition for Tillich lies mainly in the guidance found through Church history and within the sacramental community of the contemporary Church.

Tillich, who is so often an iconoclast with regard to institutionalised Christianity and the various ecclesiastical models that have developed over the centuries, nevertheless values Tradition highly. He

is well aware of the obstructive nature of Tradition at many points in its bearing on theology, but considers it nonetheless an invaluable interpretative source.

'No one' he writes

is able to leap over two thousand years of Church history and become contemporaneous with the writers of the New Testament, except in the spiritual sense of accepting Jesus as the Christ. Every person who encounters a biblical text is guided in his religious understanding of it by the understanding of all previous generations. Even the Reformers were dependent on the Roman tradition against which they protested... /5

Tillich's theology demonstrates again and again the importance of what he calls 'the Protestant principle', but in this matter of Tradition and its living relevance through one's engagement with it in the community of the Church today, we can see how he had a leaning towards Roman Catholicism; not in its structural expression but in its magisterial depth. It is a leaning that Tillich himself readily admits.

The basic sources of theology then, as Tillich perceives them, lie in the first instance in Scripture; indispensable for our understanding of Scripture however are these twin resources of Culture and Tradition. The Christian message in both its content and communication draws from these three wells; as such there is no pure biblical water but only that which is at the same time filtered through human conditioning.

That there is no pure biblical word, however, is not to be regretted for without its human conditioning it could not become incarnate! It could not be received by the world, in the world, for the world.

Two Criticisms

Perhaps after this rather rapid run along some of the major highways in Tillich's approach to Scripture, it might be opportune at this point to pause and catch our breath! And in pausing we will glance briefly at two persistent criticisms that are raised against much of this theological scheme.

The first criticism concerns the reduction by Tillich of the importance of the historical element in Scripture. The second refers to the apparent lack of any real interest in the work of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture.

Personally I feel that neither criticism can be easily dismissed. But I also feel that they often arise out of a failure to grasp Tillich's view of history, and certainly a failure to recognise that orthodox views of the Holy Spirit (if we can even delineate such views accurately and consistently) simply cannot handle Tillich's highly complicated perception of what is meant by Spirit.

Certainly with regard to the first criticism Tillich would want to say that Jesus of Nazareth was an historical figure, but that that is relatively unimportant in comparison to his theological (and existential) significance for faith as the Christ. When we call Him the Christ we are making an affirmation of faith not passing a judgement on historical facts or non-facts.

Tillich argues that it is enough to know that there was such a man, Jesus, who walked this earth many centuries ago, and that is about as much as can be said, historically speaking, for we cannot retrace our steps back to those days in the Middle East. What we gain from the Gospels is a 'picture' of Him because the scriptures do not provide historical records such as we might find about Caesar. The New Testament provides rather a testimony to the power in Him that impressed itself upon His disciples as the Christ. /6

Tillich would maintain however that there is an inner consistency between this belief in the Christ and the historical reality in Jesus that gave rise to it; he does not separate the historical Jesus from the Christ of faith.

In all of this Tillich is simply saying what most New Testament scholars would maintain, namely, that there is no historical Jesus available to us who step out from behind the Christological imagery in which He is presented in the Gospels. But that said there will remain a wide variation in the degrees of historical scepticism that we bring to the Bible. Father Dulles, for example, one of Tillich's leading critics argues that Tillich reduces the historical elements in the Bible down to such a bare minimum that the question must arise whether such a weak historical base can in fact support the Christian Gospel at all!

That however raises the further question about how far our faith is tied into a literal acceptance of the biblical presentation of events.

For myself I must confess that I find I am left with the impression that Tillich's historical scepticism is not always justified, and that

sometimes it is the outcome more of his philosophy of history than a careful assessment of the biblical documents and a detailed exegesis of the texts.

On the second matter of the Spirit I would find this a less well founded criticism.

Clearly Tillich is not concerned with theories of 'verbal inspiration' when he addresses himself to the Bible, but he would certainly see the Spirit active both within the witness of Scripture itself and in the reception of that witness in the believer. And while he has no simple view of what is meant by the Spirit - how could he? - nevertheless he is quite succinct in one of his sermons: 'Christ is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ.' /7

Perhaps in all of this Tillich is a good guide in that his theology bears its own testimony to the work of the Spirit by its very refusal to attempt any academic definition.

That said however, these criticisms will continue as a kind of defiant background noise in the remainder of this paper!

The Human Situation

We have so far looked at a sketchy outline of some of the main factors in Tillich's approach to Scripture.

Let us double back now to the starting point and see where this approach in fact leads us in the actual treatment of the Bible. And the starting point for Tillich is unashamedly 'anthropological'. He regards the starting point in theology as the human situation. We hear the Word always where we are today.

This is quite a different approach from that of Karl Barth, for example, who would disown any such anthropological basis for the theological task. Though this generalised way of putting it may be an injustice to Barth who does speak about interpretation of Scripture as necessitating the Bible in the one hand and the newspaper in the other.

Tillich's human starting point obviously affects how he deals with Scripture. Barth comes to Scripture from above, as it were, regarding the Bible in terms of Divine revelation; the revelatory word 'written'. Tillich, on the other hand, comes to Scripture from below; from where

man finds himself in the world. He sees questioning man coming to the Scriptures listening for answers and then sifting these answers through his religious, cultural, and historical existence.

We may wish to argue the theological toss on this difference of approach and perhaps conclude that there is truth in both avenues of which we must not lose sight. It would seem though, on the face of it, that most people begin from where they are and their own human situation in the world, and that this is especially true of secular man. So that Tillich is already on the side of those with whom he is particularly anxious to communicate.

Most, if not all of us, come to the Bible lugging along with us all the baggage of our past and the personal conditioning of our own particular upbringing with its distinctive social mores and cultural setting. We do not come with our mind like a blank page awaiting the imprint of the Word. So, whether consciously or not, we receive and interpret the words of Scripture only by passing them through the intricate tapestry of our own psyche.

Tillich considers this reception of the kerygma not only unavoidable, but also necessary; necessary if the biblical message is to address us where we are and gain an entrance into our lives where we are. This accommodation of the message to the human situation is precisely what is meant, argues Tillich, by the principle of Incarnation.

It must be said though with equal force that while the biblical documents are in the first instance approached from the human situation and received from within it, the outcome of this accommodation is that the human situation is radically changed in the process. The Word does not leave the human situation intact, but exercises a judgement on it while at the same time lodging within it.

In this sense, it seems to me, that it would be more accurate not to describe Tillich's approach to the Bible as 'anthropological' but rather as 'incarnational'.

There is also something more, however, to be said in relation to all of this and it is this 'something more' that leaves many of Tillich's critics uneasy.

The message itself too undergoes a change when it lodges itself within the human situation. And it is this transforming element that

takes place within the message itself that ensures its ability to accommodate itself to the experience of those who hear and believe; who hear and believe within the context of their religious, cultural, historical, temperamental, and social conditioning.

Though at this point, I think, we must differentiate between the interior content of the biblical message and its exterior forms of communication. And here Tillich's distinction between the 'fundamental' and 'traditional' concepts of religion is vitally important. The changes demanded in the message itself and its element of accommodation relate to the exterior forms of the message; to the 'outer edges' of the message, while the 'centre remains firm'.

The failure to make this differentiation can lead to an unjustified accusation that Tillich's theology has, in fact, produced - or at least permits the medium of human experience to produce - what amounts to 'another Gospel'.

It is precisely in this highly delicate area of the accommodation of the Christian message to the human situation that Tillich's theology moves among the biblical documents with what can only be described as a radical freedom. It is a liberty that has accordingly given rise to the question, 'Is Paul Tillich a dangerous man?' /8

Tillich's own unequivocal reply is 'Yes'!

Personally I do not consider that to be an indictment of his theology, as others do, but on the contrary a sharpening of its challenge.

Symbolism

This dangerous liberty in Tillich's method is evident in his willingness to dress scriptural language, even its most basic terms, in modern garments. This is particularly true of his rejection of traditional Christological models, and so central concepts such as those associated with Atonement and Incarnation are often treated in psychological rather than theological terms. Though one must be careful not to state the matter in a simplistic way as there is no clear line of demarcation drawn between psychology and theology; both disciplines overlap and share common territory.

It is this advance on the Christian Gospel on all fronts and with an array of various insights from many quarters that highlights the

importance of symbolism in Tillich's thought. Symbols and their meaning are fundamental in communicating the message. Indeed he regards religious language for the most part as symbolic language. /9

But we must be clear about what Tillich means by symbol in this connection, for he never speaks about 'mere' symbols. Rather symbols are powerful factors, indeed indispensable factors, in Christianity; they are part of the message itself, sharing in the realities to which they also point. In this sense we might describe symbols as sacramental in character, and therefore they are more than just 'signs'. They are part of what is indicated and inseparable from it. For example the name Jesus Christ is both historical reality and symbolic model; the Christ is a symbol, but applied to Jesus it also participates in the facts relating to the person who was a carpenter from Nazareth. Further the historic reality was such as demanded this symbol, while the symbol, of course, would be both empty and meaningless without the reality behind it.

Tillich himself has said that what he means by symbol is essentially what other theologians mean by analogy. But it seems to me that what he means by symbolism is hardly what Aquinas, for example, meant by analogy!

Further Tillich argues that symbols must be self-communicating, they should need no explanation if they are still vibrant. The passage of time however does mean that they may need to be restated in new ways. Some may even become redundant and need to be replaced. Such replacement will not come about by setting out deliberately to invent new ones, new symbols only come into being as they 'grasp' us. They evolve, as it were, out of religious expression and are not constructed and then implanted into religious expression.

By and large however Tillich is not keen to talk about the necessity of new symbols so much as the interpretation of those that have belonged to the Christian message from the beginning.

Symbols then are part of the 'moveable furniture' belonging to the biblical scenery. The play, as it were, remains the same and its inner message, but the sets are not fixed structures.

This is not the same as saying that the biblical symbols are dispensable. And it is on this point that Tillich would take issue with Rudolf Bultmann. As far as Tillich is concerned the central symbols of

Christianity remain; symbols like, for example, 'the Christ', 'Son of God', 'Son of Man', the Resurrection and the Ascension.

But Tillich's insistence is that when they cease to function for modern man in a literal sense, then they must be reinterpreted in a 'nonliteralistic way'. In this sense they are not dispensable, but rather capable of being viewed from new angles and reassessed in the light of the human situation today, which in so many ways is different from the world of the New Testament situation of the First Century.

What we encounter here is something of the same spirit as that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he proposed his 'nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts', or what came to be popularly known as 'religionless Christianity.'

Bultmann's programme of 'Demythologization' is much more radical. He argued that the biblical message, in so far as it employs mythological or meaningless symbolic language and ideas, must be purged. This can mean abandoning such terms and concepts altogether if the message is to be heard and understood by the world today.

Tillich does not go so far, he insists that the language remains, but must where necessary undergo reinterpretation. This reinterpretation will often mean the baptising of ancient biblical images into the waters of contemporary philosophy and psychology. His two books The Courage To Be and Dynamics of Faith are classic demonstrations of this baptism at work; bringing biblical themes alive for those who can no longer accept them without a great many questions and doubts, or who have simply rejected them as inaudible or meaningless voices from a primitive religious past.

Tillich however (and this is often overlooked) is also insistent that where the biblical symbols can be accepted in a literal way by unquestioning believers then they should not be disturbed. Many of his sermons indeed can be read by fundamentalist Christians without any acute discomfort.

But when questions are asked then theology, argues Tillich, must have the freedom to 'move' the 'furniture'. The answering theologian must be liberated, and not least liberated in his treatment of Scripture.

That said, Tillich is nevertheless emphatic that when the answer-

ing theologian has done all he can to assist in communicating the biblical message, he depends in the final analysis on the power of the Word to communicate itself.

So it is to this final aspect that we turn our attention.

Scripture as Word of God

All of this work that is carried out with the freedom that theology creates, is also carried out within discipline, otherwise liberation becomes licence.

This discipline is determined by two principal factors; absolute integrity to the biblical message itself accompanied by a constant search after the 'interior logic' of the texts, and secondly the obligation of working within the community of the Church.

I quote from Tillich himself when in the First Volume of his Systematic Theology he describes the theologian's task in these words: 'He must stand in the atmosphere of the religious reality of which he speaks.' And in other places in his Systematic Theology he writes about 'the circle' as being essential in providing the theologian with the disciplines of his work and so saving him from the dangers of 'individualism'.

This discipline, which accompanies the freedom, is an important element in Tillich's understanding of how the words of Scripture can become for us the word of God.

He maintains that the basic criterion is always the relation of the biblical words to the Word become flesh in Jesus as the Christ. So that it is not just any word that can become word of God for us, or even any biblical word, but only those words that bear witness either directly or indirectly, to Jesus the Christ.

These words in turn become God's word depending then in the first instance on their Christological content, and then on their being received by someone.

But again not just anyone, but those who acknowledge Jesus as the Christ and therefore who belong to the community of the Christ - or 'the Body of Christ', which is the Church. We might therefore describe the biblical words becoming God's word in terms both of their

'evangelical' and 'ecumenical' setting; their evangelical witness to Jesus Christ within the ecumenical reception of the whole Church.

As this is vital in any examination of the role of Scripture in Tillich's theology it is perhaps pertinent to quote a little more extensively from his Systematic Theology:

The Bible is the word of God in two senses. It is the document of the final revelation; and it participates in the final revelation of which it is the document. /10

This means presumably that the Bible is not itself the word of God - the biblical words are not 'ipso facto' God's word, but rather the Bible bears witness to the Word who is Jesus Christ while at the same time through its testimony it shares the power of the Word and the community of faith in Christ brought into being by it.

The biblical message then embraces both 'more (and less) than the biblical books'. /11

The precise way in which the biblical message shares in that to which it bears witness, is through the simple fact that there is no revelation unless there is someone who receives it as revelation. So therefore 'the act of reception is a part of the event itself'. /12 Indeed, Tillich argues, that without this reception and the creation of the reality, or community, that bears witness to it there would be no revelatory event.

Scripture then becomes word of God not only in terms of its 'content' and its 'reception' within the discipline and freedom of the confessing community, but it will also require for its 'communication' as word of God those symbols and 'sensuous instruments' that enable us to be 'grasped' by its power and be open to the Spirit. This is the sacramental dimension.

One final comment in all of this.

The theologian, says Tillich, must bring two main attitudes to the Bible if he is to be open to it as a source for systematic theology and word of God for him as a Christian - scholarship and devotion.

This suggests that the Scriptures must be handled dispassionately with all the equipment of historical criticism, and yet at the same

time handled with the commitment of one who finds here in the 'kerygma' things that are matters of 'ultimate concern'.

This two-fold approach is well illustrated by Tillich's own sermons where we are aware both of the scholarship lying behind them, though hidden, and yet aware too of the clear personal commitment of the preacher to the message he expounds.

Walter Leibrecht in an essay in honour of Paul Tillich wrote back in the nineteen fifties how when Tillich preached

the speaker stands forth as a man who in himself, with his whole being, is at one with his subject. This concentration makes a sermon or speech by Tillich ... although it may sometimes be quite involved in its expression - an act of communion. /13

It is in such 'communion' that the biblical words and the Divine Word meet and fuse into the Gospel.

Concluding Comments and Questions

What I have attempted in this paper has not been easy, for Paul Tillich's theology is not a neatly packaged system carefully labelled. As a result this assessment of the role of Scripture in his thinking has been more in the nature of a nomadic wandering, than a confident march which easily recognises its points of departure, its clearly marked signposts along the route, and its point of arrival.

There is therefore an obvious lack of continuity in the treatment of our theme, and a lack too of the kind of precision that dogmatic theologians and biblical fundamentalists cherish. That, of course, can be gain as well as loss for Christian theology does not always pursue its course by rigid principles of logic. When the finite grapples with the Infinite there should always be a random element; Deus comprehensus non est Deus.

Nevertheless some concluding comments are perhaps in order, if for no other reason than to signal the end of our 'wandering'.

William Temple, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, once caricatured professional theologians as 'men who spend blameless lives giving entirely orthodox answers to questions no one is asking.' /14

Drysdale, Tillich, IBS 5, October 1983

As a theologian Tillich is in no way open to such scathing criticism, indeed everything about him seems to contradict Temple's 'tongue-in-cheek' portrait. Tillich's personal life was far from 'blameless', as some of his less savoury critics have been quick to point out in recent years. His theological answers certainly were hardly ever 'entirely orthodox', and his deep and abiding concern was always to address himself to the questions that he discerned to be the most important being raised by his contemporaries - both in the religious and secular areas of human existence.

Several critical questions of my own however keep recurring in my reading and reflections on Tillich's whole approach to the Christian message.

His 'anthropological' concern is absolutely basic to everything he has to say to us. The 'human situation' is the arena where he works, and out of which he develops the incarnational answers of Christian theology to man's existential questions.

My question that will not go away is this: how far does Tillich's theology break out of this circle of concern with the 'human situation', so that it arrests us with 'the New Reality' that Jesus the Christ has come into this world as something that is from beyond it? Does Tillich guard the mystery of Revelation or remove it?

When all is said and done I am often left with the uneasy feeling that Tillich remains trapped within this human circle, which therefore becomes a sign of non-commitment to that Ultimate Concern which he talks so much about!

Does he avoid the ever present danger of putting theology before preaching; the human activity before the Divine proclamation?

There is no doubt that when the 'human situation' becomes a controlling factor to the extent that it does in Tillich's theology, then it runs the serious risk of being the only really important factor.

Helmut Thielicke makes a pertinent observation in this direction in his Preface to his studies in the Apostles' Creed entitled I Believe, when he writes:

Only after the proclaimed word strikes home do we reflect upon what happened and relate it to the problems of life. Where

theology forgets its secondary position, the result is spiritual sickness, of the kind of which traces are already at hand. We become almost completely preoccupied with ourselves, inquiring less about what the word of God says and more about who we are and the degree to which we can in our situation understand and appropriate that word. /15

Related to this I wonder too how far Tillich escapes from his own intellectualism and aestheticism. He is, as he himself acknowledges, primarily a theologian for the intellectual and that is part of his greatness, but also of his weakness perhaps as well. So again and again the question crops up; how far Tillich's theology in its urgent desire to communicate, especially through intellectual and aesthetic forms, can concede that there are 'reasons (for faith) which the reason does not know'?

His emphasis upon the need to reinterpret biblical language and concepts if the Christian message is to communicate itself in each new generation, is undoubtedly vital and only the most obscurantist can ignore it; but does Tillich in removing, as it were, the voice of angels from the Bible remove a poetic dimension in the interests of rational explanation without which the biblical message cannot be heard for what it really is?

One can readily admit that Tillich's power lies in his mastery at breaking down and analysing 'the score', but what in the end of the day we most need to hear is 'the music' of the Gospel. Personally speaking for that I find that I have to return again and again to other theologians like Barth and Bonhoeffer, the Baillie brothers, Moltmann, Luther and Augustine. And with them also obscure people I have encountered leading simple lives on isolated farms or in city streets, or caught in the web of social injustices like racism, unemployment, and long bitter historical feuds; theologians all in whose lives the biblical music rings out!

There is of course much in Tillich that would identify itself with all of this, so I must temper criticism with caution. Or better still, allow the accused to speak for himself. He has written describing his theological work in terms of what he calls 'a pervasive sense of joy':

I have always walked up to a desk or pulpit with fear and trembling, but the contact with the audience gives me a pervasive sense of joy, the job of a creative communion, of giving and taking, even if the audience is not vocal. /16

That maybe is Tillich's greatest argument in his own defence, for any theology that has about it a ring of 'pervasive joy' cannot be far from the Kingdom!

Notes

1. Paul Tillich by J. Heywood Thomas (Fletcher & Son), p.43.
2. Morality and Beyond (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.30.
3. Tillich derives the phrase Ultimate Concern from Deut. 6.5.
4. Systematic Theology Vol.1 (Nisbet), p.40.
5. Ibid, vol.1, p.42.
6. Ultimate Concern (S.C.M.), p.143.
7. The Shaking of the Foundations (S.C.M.), P.132.
8. Ultimate Concern, p.180.
9. Dynamics of Faith (Harper Torchbooks), p.41 f.
0. Systematic Theology, p.176.
1. Ibid, p.40.
2. Ibid, p.60.
3. Religion and Culture (S.C.M.), p.3.
4. Quoted in I Believe in Evangelism by David Watson. Pub. Hodder & Stoughton, p.14.
5. I Believe, Pub. Collins, p.vii.
6. Ultimate Concern, p.xvi.

Dennis Pardee, and others, Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters

(SBL Sources for Biblical Study 15),
Scholars Press, 1982 pp 247 \$24.50

In the beginning (of this story, at least) there was the apostle Paul, who was much given to writing letters. Much later there was a Paul Seminar, established by the Society of Biblical Literature (which is American for Society for Biblical Literature) for the study of the aforementioned, which duly gave rise to an 'ancient epistolography group', the primary purpose of which was to place the New Testament epistles in their literary-historical perspective, because, of course, Paul was really nowhere near the beginning of the story of letter-writing, and thus the book under review had its genesis.

Intended as a research tool for students and scholars, the major part of the book is devoted to forty-eight 'written documents effecting communication between two or more persons who cannot communicate orally' (the definition of 'letters' adopted by the authors of the Handbook), dating from the seventh-sixth centuries B.C. (mostly found at Arad and Lachish), and the second century A.D. (Murabba'at and Nahal Hever). The consonantal text of each letter is presented in transliteration (a vocalized version is also offered in an appendix), preceded by a bibliography and followed by a translation, philological notes and notes on epistolographic considerations and general interpretation. Succeeding chapters deal with formulaic features of Hebrew letters and Hebrew letter types, and in three further chapters are presented the one extant Phoenician letter (which hardly merits a Handbook of its own) and fragments of letters preserved in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic literature. (The Hebrew Bible chapter is strikingly different from the others in that there alone Hebrew type or, to be precise, a photographic representation of excerpts from a printed Hebrew bible, is used.)

An index of Hebrew words, personal and geographical names appearing in the letters concludes the book. All in all, a wealth of information, not only for enthusiasts for epistolography but for anyone seeking a convenient means of access to these documents from the biblical period.

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D.R.G. Beattie

Peter D. Miscall, The Workings of Old Testament Narrative,
Fortress Press, Philadelphia and Scholars
Press, Chico, 183 pp viii + 150 \$8.95

This monograph in the Semeia Studies series is a contribution to the methodology of Old Testament study, offering detailed literary analyses of Genesis 12 and 1 Samuel 16-22 in order to demonstrate the author's methods and to present a challenge to older types of analysis. The book is undoubtedly a contemporary treatment. In reaction to certain presuppositions and tendencies of what have been the standard critical approaches to the Old Testament, and source criticism in particular, a growing number of writers have in recent years been bringing strictly literary criteria to bear upon the Old Testament. Such studies have largely brushed aside historical issues and source-critical analyses and concentrated first and foremost on what the text (treated as a whole) actually says and how it says it. In many ways this has been a fruitful exercise, and undoubtedly such methods offer us numerous insights into the minds of the biblical writers. In particular, we have been usefully reminded that the literary methods of those writers were in many ways very different from contemporary western literature. One of the chief apostles of the new literary criticism has been Robert Alter, to whose stimulating insights Miscall is considerably indebted.

With the one basic premise that Genesis - 2 Kings constitutes a literary unity, Miscall sets out to offer us what he calls a 'close reading' of his selected texts. His basic observation about the text is the fairly obvious fact that Hebrew narrative, typically, presents the reader with a sequence of events, if not without some dialogue, and does not often discuss or describe thoughts or motives or character. The result is that there is a certain inherent ambiguity in the characterization: we know what the chief actors in the narrative did, but can only make our own estimates - in the light of the context and the total narrative - as to why they acted thus. So far it is difficult to disagree; and it is true enough that our English versions, when they translate waw-consecutive constructions by the use of the word 'so', import a causality that is not explicit in the Hebrew.

Building on this foundation, Miscall explores in some depth the range of possibilities for interpreting his selected texts, indulging in occasional polemic against standard commentaries, which normally turn a blind eye to any ambiguities and confidently assert their own

particular viewpoints. His reading of Genesis 12 and 1 Samuel 16-22 is intended to serve as a paradigm: thus one should read the whole of Old Testament narrative.

There is no doubt that Miscall springs some surprises, and forces us to reconsider our longheld interpretations of specific stories; he also challenges our basic methodology constantly. He does so, moreover, in a very provocative and readable fashion, and perhaps ultimately that is achievement enough. But to the reviewer, at least, many of Miscall's assertions are questionable, his reinterpretations are frequently implausible, and his methodology is scarcely watertight. No reader should be brain-washed into supposing that modern literary criticism compels us to go far down Miscall's road.

The most worrying aspect of Miscall's methodology is that he treats the unevennesses of the text as if they can only be meaningful literary signals. It may well be true that standard commentaries too readily make recourse to different strata or contradictory sources; but it is surely undeniable that a variety of sources do underlie many Old Testament narrative books. If so, then we cannot and must not take it for granted that the compilers intended every apparent effect. Literary criticism and source criticism must work together.

The most dubious of his assertions is that where two (or more) interpretations of a passage are possible, we must adopt a 'both ... and' philosophy - no matter how unlikely some of the alternative 'readings' may be. In Genesis 12, for instance, we must both believe that Abraham is to be viewed as a man 'leaving Haran in faith and obedience to God's call' and at the same time that he is 'an opportunist who will take advantage of any situation and of anyone, including God' (page 17). The latter interpretation is based on the ambiguity, as Miscall sees it, of the word 'as' in verse 4, which tells the reader only that 'Abram went as the Lord had told him'; Miscall explores the possibility that 'Abram went' for his own selfish purposes and ulterior motives, rather than 'because' of the Lord's instructions. Of course all things are possible; but one must seriously doubt whether such a viewpoint ever crossed the mind of a single ancient Israelite reader. Indeed, Miscall is on less solid linguistic-semantic grounds than he supposes. It will not do to determine the meanings of everyday words by relatively distant contexts; to gauge the proper sense of ka'asher in Genesis 12:4, one must not so to speak open the dictionary and say 'take your pick' of the range of meanings offered. On the contrary, the collocation in Genesis 12 1:4 of command and fulfilment virtually compels the sense

'because'. Again, Miscall ignores the likelihood, indeed the near-certainty, that many of the narratives of Genesis took shape within an established frame of reference, or relatively fixed tradition. Abraham is not portrayed as a plaster saint, it is true; but who can doubt the overall effect of the ancient traditions about him, and likewise of the biblical narratives?

That is not to say that there are not passages of unclear effect and intention; it may well be that there is deliberate tension between passages complimentary to David and passages critical of him. In general, however, the tension seems to lie more in contrasts between different passages than inside any single passage.

Finally, one wonders whether it is not significant that Miscall's examples are Abraham and David; in each case we have a lengthy and complex series of narratives, containing a number of admitted tensions or disharmonies. One wonders whether Miscall's sort of exercise would really provide much food for thought in the case of minor Old Testament figures who occupy no more than, say, a couple of chapters apiece.

The reviewer's own judgement, then, is largely negative; but Miscall's monograph deserves study and analysis, and offers at the very least a reasonably priced and very interesting and non-technical introduction to current literary analysis of the Old Testament. It raises important questions, even if the answer to most of them is 'No'!

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John de Gruchy and Chas. Villa-Vicencio (Eds), Apartheid is a Heresy

Lutterworth, Guildford, 1983
pp xx, 184 £6.95

Those who would defend apartheid in South Africa have often claimed the support of the Bible, the resulting ideology then being used to justify the present political and economic system. Most anti-apartheid debate has centred on the latter issues, but here is a book that takes the topic out of its more usual political framework and places it firmly in the context of the Church.

Published as a Festschrift in honour of Dr Byers Naude, the book consists of nine chapters contributed by a group of South African theologians and church leaders of varying denominational, academic and cultural backgrounds, who share the conviction that apartheid is indeed a heresy. The name of Desmond Tutu is probably the best known among them, closely followed by that of Allan Boesak, who is now president of W.A.R.C.

The first essay is the address that Dr Boesak gave at the W.A.R.C. conference at Ottawa, and four of the others have already appeared in journals or as separate publications, but have been thoroughly revised and rewritten for this volume.

The various contributors focus on complementary dimensions of the central issue. David Bosch gives an historical analysis of the events that led to the introduction of apartheid into the life of the N.G.K. during the first half of the nineteenth century, thus creating segregated churches, and David Bosch then relates this to the theological and missiological debate of the last hundred years.

Desmond Tutu concentrates on the way apartheid contradicts the gospel of Christ by accepting as God-given what is in fact contrary to God's reconciling purposes, while Simon Maimels argues that the heart of the matter is a false view of man, and reflects on the anthropological heresy that is found in 'white theology'.

The two editors then demonstrate how racism has pervaded the life and practice of the English-speaking Churches and examine the meaning of heresy in relation to some of the objections that have been made to labelling apartheid in this particular way.

Two of the most significant chapters however are those which examine in detail the claim that Scripture can be used in defence of the apartheid ideology, and in particular the use that is made of it in the key N.G.K. publication Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture, which claimed that the Bible allowed the Church to support 'separate development'. Douglas Bax writes an exegetical critique of the report and William Vorster shows up its interpretational weaknesses.

Although the 'Landman' Report, as it is popularly called, refers to a large number of texts (nearly fifty in all) its case is really built on only a few, to which the N.G.K. has traditionally appealed over the

years in support of its position, viz. Gen.1:28; Gen.11:1-9; Deut.32:8; Acts 2:5-13; and Acts 17:26, all of which, it is convincingly shown, are basically misinterpreted. Bax criticises the selective use of the Bible and the hermeneutic principles employed, while Vorster deals in detail with each locus classicus.

It is worth quoting a few examples. In Gen. 1:28 he criticizes as 'eisegesis rather than exegesis' the assumption that the 'diversity' of volke (peoples) is implicit in the command to multiply and fill the earth. Ethnic diversity is neither presupposed nor commanded.

He demonstrates that the Report is wrong in interpreting Gen. 1:28 and 9:1-7 as commands, 'God blessed them and God said' being merely a literal translation of the typical Hebrew idiom of parataxis. 'Man received from the hand of God also the blessing that empowers him to reproduce and multiply'. (Von Rad, Das Erste Buch Mose, p.47).

In Deut.32:8-9 it is crucial to the interpretation whether the text should read 'Sons of Israel' (A.V., R.V., R.S.V.marg, N.I.V., and - significantly - Afrikaans 1933 and 1954) or 'Sons of God' (R.S.V., N.E.B. and G.N.B.), which receives support from LXX and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Von Rad thinks it 'as good as certain that this is the correct reading'. The sense is then that God assigned one heathen nation to every 'heavenly being' as vice-regent but chose Israel as his own people over whom He would rule directly. The passage thus has nothing to do with homelands or even territories, but with God's election of Israel. The N.G.K. interpretation collapses, as it does in the other passages studied.

It would be an understatement to say that this is an important book for those wishing to follow the current debate. It is valuable for the appendix alone, which reprints a collection of key documents related to the discussion.

Sam Hutchinson

D.C. Verner, The Household of God: the Social World of the Pastoral Epistles

SBL Dissertation Series 71

Scholars Press pb. 1x + 207 pp

\$13.50

Dr Verner has drawn a convincing picture of the social background of the Pastoral Epistles. By concentrating chiefly on the Haustafeln (domestic codes of conduct), he has been able to show that the Epistles are written from the point of view of a securely established church, probably in Asia Minor between 110 and 120 A.D., whose leadership was made up of comparatively affluent people. They could afford to keep slaves; they accepted the domestic mores of the best of the Graeco-Roman culture in the midst of which they lived; they wished to keep the leadership in the hands of the older and better-off members of the community; they were striving to fight off the challenge of incipient Gnosticism, with its appeal to women and its more intellectual interpretation of Christianity.

It is surprising that Dr Verner never actually attempts to prove that the Pastorals are pseudonymous, that they belong to the second century, etc. He prefers the methodology of reconstructing as far as he can the social background of the early second century in Asia Minor, and then showing that the Pastorals fit into this background. It might have been better if he had made this clear at the outset. Defenders of the Pauline authorship (of which there are few today among competent scholars) could accuse him of assuming the conclusions he wishes to reach.

He does not apply his analysis of Haustafeln to the passage from Onosander about the qualities needed for a general to which commentators on the Pastorals so often refer. He is aware of it (p.152,n.), but makes no use of it. I think it is a pity that on p.150, where he is discussing the question of monepiscopacy in the Pastorals, he does not clearly face what appears to me to be by far the most likely solution: the author knew that monepiscopacy had not existed in Paul's day, so his references to it had to be ambiguous. Dr Verner, though he handles NT Greek competently, seems to be weak on Latin. On the few occasions on which he quotes it he seems to get it wrong (pp 34,119).

Thirsk

Antony Hanson

